Toshiyuki Takagaki
JAPAN

Raising Students' Awareness of the Varieties of English

As a university English teacher in Japan, I often encounter students who come to my class with little knowledge about the diverse varieties of English that are spoken throughout the world. They are often unaware that people in countries like Britain, Nigeria, and the United States speak unique varieties of English, or that language variation also exists within each country due to different regional and social dialects. Additionally, they often do not know about the related issue of language styles, which refers to the fact that all individuals adjust the formality of their speech, depending on whom they are talking to and the context.

These issues of language variation and style all fall under the area of study known as *sociolinguistics,* a broadly defined term that also covers topics such as language policy and English as an international language. Although sociolinguistics is important to language learning, many Japanese students who received

at least six years of English instruction in junior and senior high school do not seem to recognize how English is used and treated in the global community. For example, many students do not know the major countries where English is spoken, what type of variations exist in those countries, or how English became an official language in countries like India or Nigeria. As a result, because standard American English is the only model they are usually exposed to in the classroom in Japan (Honna and Takeshita 1998), students risk developing the mistaken impression that everyone in the world speaks that variety, or that this one type of English is spoken throughout the United States and in all situations. Studying vocabulary and grammar and practicing the four skills are obviously essential, but students may form a limited, or one-sided view of the English language if they are not given the opportunity to think about it from a sociolinguistic perspective. For those students who truly wish to master the English language, there is a strong rationale for adding sociolinguistic activities to their studies.

The importance of sociolinguistics in language education

A basic understanding of sociolinguistics is important for English learners who wish to take full advantage of job opportunities in the new global economy, where they will undoubtedly encounter different varieties of English. Learning about different varieties of English will help them broaden their knowledge of the language, and they will be better equipped to deal with those varieties. Another benefit is that once students study the topic, they learn that one variety of English is not superior to another variety, and they will develop increased tolerance for speakers of different dialects. Additionally, they will have a good understanding about the role of global English and will be aware of important issues such as multilingualism and the functions of English as an international language.

As an educator, I do not simply want students to have a good command of English—I also want them to be informed speakers of English. Therefore, I believe it is useful for learners of English to take a workshop, if not a whole course, at some point during their studies to familiarize themselves with how varieties of

English are actually used in the global community. As stated above, this has ramifications for understanding language in societies and having respect and tolerance for all varieties of English.

Workshops to increase students' sociolinguistic awareness

To illustrate how to incorporate activities regarding language varieties, language styles, and the role of English as an international language into the classroom, I will describe three workshops I gave over three days in my lectures at a public high school in Japan.

Workshop 1:
English around the world

I established this topic to raise students' awareness of varieties of native and non-native English that are spoken in countries across the world. To begin, I asked students to name the countries where English is the primary language, and I gave them a couple of minutes to make a list in their notebooks. I then asked three students to share what they had listed, and I wrote their responses on the blackboard. The students came up with four major English-speaking countries—the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. One student also came up with two countries where English is used as a second language—India and Singapore.

I placed these countries into two columns on the blackboard. One column contained the major English-speaking countries, and the other column contained the countries where English is used as a second or foreign language. After expanding the list, I explained to the students that there are in fact three categories, which are based on Kachru's (1985) three overlapping circles: (1) the Inner Circle, which consists of countries where English is used as a primary language, such as the United Kingdom; (2) the Outer Circle, which consists of countries where English is used as a second or official language, such as Nigeria; and (3) the Expanding Circle, which refers to countries where English is studied as a foreign language, such as Korea. I then pointed out how these Englishes differ from each other. At the same time, I reminded the students that several countries use English as an official language and, as a result, non-native speakers of English outnumber native speakers of English (Crystal 1997). This suggests that it is impor-

tant to be familiar with the non-native varieties of English because there may be more chances to engage in English communication with non-native speakers of English than with native speakers.

To reinforce the fact that there are different Englishes around the world, and to provide introductory information about how different English varieties are created, I used a recording from Trudgill and Hannah (1994, with cassette). Without telling the students that the six speakers are from India, the United Kingdom, Australia, Ghana, Jamaica, and the United States, I played the tape of them reading the following passage:

> As a language changes, it may well change in different ways in different places. No one who speaks a particular language can remain in close contact with all the other speakers of that language. Social and geographical barriers to communication as well as sheer distance mean that a change that starts among speakers in one particular locality will probably spread only to other areas with which these speakers are in close contact. This is what has happened over the centuries in the case of the languages we now call English and German (Trudgill and Hannah 1994, 147).

After playing the tape twice, I asked the students to guess each speaker's country.

Since I realized this activity could be difficult even for native speakers, at the end I assured the students that the objective was to raise their awareness of different varieties of English, not to score how many speakers they identified correctly. More importantly, I emphasized that non-native varieties of English should not be regarded as inferior because they are as intricate and effective a linguistic system as native varieties (Kachru 1985).

After this workshop, some students commented that they understood more about how many English speakers there are in the world, and how many different varieties of English exist. Some others mentioned that the listening activity was impressive, and additional comments revealed that they understood the concept of English as an official language. Taken as a whole, these comments indicate that the activities effectively raised students' awareness of varieties of English around the world.

Reflections on Workshop 1

Upon reflection, I feel that identifying the nationalities of the six people on the tape was too difficult for students with little background knowledge of the varieties of English. Thus I would suggest using three or four speakers instead of six. Finally, in case the cassette is not available with Trudgill and Hannah (1994), a teacher could develop the material by asking some English speakers from different places to record a passage on a cassette or a CD.

Workshop 2:
Variation within a language

The topic for this workshop was designed to familiarize students with the types of English language variation that occur within countries. Specifically, I wanted students to understand that in any one country, regional and social factors will affect how English is spoken. I also wanted to indicate some of the grammatical features that made the varieties different. Finally, I wanted to introduce the concept of language style, yet another factor that influences language variety.

To begin, I wrote on the blackboard the Japanese sentence *Sonna kotowo shitewa ikemasen,* which is a standard way of saying *Don't do such a thing.* Then I asked the class how they would say this to their friends, to call attention to the different lexical choices that derived from their different regional dialects. After I had their answers, I shared my own Japanese dialect with them, to illustrate how it differed from their dialect.

I pointed out that, like English, Japanese varies widely according to region in terms of pronunciation, lexis, and syntax. I then showed them a dialect map of the United States from Crystal (1997, 28). Next I explained that dialects are also influenced by social factors such as class, age, and gender and further explained that regional and social dialects are closely related to each other (Trudgill 2000).

To help students understand the nature of dialects, I showed a video of the scene from the musical *My Fair Lady,* where Professor Higgins, a linguist, tries to teach standard British English (also called *Received Pronunciation)* to a flower girl named Eliza, who speaks Cockney, a low-status English dialect spoken in urban London. He bets he can teach her to speak like a duchess. In the scene, Professor Higgins tries to teach the sentence *The rain in*

Spain stays mainly in the plain, but Eliza pronounces the five /ei/ diphthongs as /ai/. After watching the scene, I wrote the sentence with blanks on the blackboard as follows: *The ____ in ____ ____ ____ in the ____.* Next, I asked students to fill in the blanks as they watched the scene again. After that, I asked some students to share what they had for each blank.

In this workshop I also introduced the concept of language style, and explained that people can easily switch from an informal to a formal type of speech, depending on the situation. All speakers of a language have this ability to shift styles in this way; for example, they might speak to a close friend differently than they would to their boss.

Finally, I also explained that institutionalized varieties of English are found in the former British and American colonies, including such languages as Malaysian English, Indian English, and Philippine English, and that these languages also show variation (Kachru 1985). For example, in Malaysian English there are three varieties: Anglo-Malay, Colloquial Malaysian English, and Malay-influenced Malay English (Preshous 2001).

Most students commented that it was fun to watch the video. Also, many students mentioned that they understood more about dialects in English, although a small number of students complained about the difficulty of the workshop. Overall, these comments suggest that the activities used, especially the video activity, helped increase students' knowledge of the types of variation within the English language.

Reflections on Workshop 2

Although the students were asked to fill in the blanks of a sentence as they watched *My Fair Lady,* I had no chance to see how all the students did. Next time I would take more time to see how each one performed on this task. An alternative approach would be for students to fill in the blanks with representations of both Professor Higgins' and Eliza's pronunciation of the sentence. If students do not know the phonetic alphabet, they could be told to choose vowel combinations that they think represent the different accents. It would also be nice to point out that the phonological similarities between Cockney and Australian English come from the fact that many of the early settlers of Australia were convicts sent over from London (Crystal 1997).

Workshop 3:
English as an international language

I established English as an international language as a topic for this workshop so that students could become aware of the practicality of using English for international communication and would learn that other languages should be respected. I also wanted them to understand some advantages and disadvantages regarding English as an international language.

To begin, I asked the class how many languages there are in the world. I then told them that English is one of some 3,000 languages. Next, I asked them to list languages with more than 100 million native speakers, after which I showed them a list of the top ten languages with over 100 million speakers, noting that Chinese comes first, followed by English, Hindustani, and Spanish (Aneki.com 2004). (See the Appendix for the complete list.)

I explained to my students that the reason English is the major language used worldwide in such fields as science, business, aviation, and sports is not because it is linguistically superior to other languages; it is a major language because the United Kingdom and the United States have been powerful militarily, politically, and economically for the past two hundred years or so (Crystal 1997).

I then showed a short video featuring a Japanese company in Tokyo where English is used. The Japanese company designates English as an official language, and they use English as a communication tool even among Japanese workers. After we watched the video, I asked the class whether they were for or against using English in a domestic company. I waited for a couple of minutes and then asked them to share their opinions with their classmates. Their opinions revealed two conflicting positions: (1) that English proficiency makes it possible to communicate with many people from different language backgrounds, and (2) that it is inconvenient for Japanese or other non-native speakers of English not to be able to use their native tongue.

I pointed out that using English as an international language helps create inequality between native-speakers and non-native speakers of English in many ways (Phillipson 1992). For instance, Japanese scientists will probably never win the Nobel Prize while they report their discoveries in Japanese. Clearly, this is

not fair because it will take more time and energy to write up their research findings in English than in Japanese, while native speakers of English do not have to go through this. In this sense, we should respect all languages equally. On the other hand, because it is the most prevalent global language, using English is the most realistic way to interact with people who do not share the same language. It is also true that no person can master all the languages in the world for international communication. As a practical conclusion, I stressed the importance of mastering communication skills in English, which should coexist with realizing the importance of multilingualism and having respect for all languages.

After this workshop, about half of the students commented on the video. Many of them found it interesting that Japanese companies use English on an official basis, and other comments related to the current importance of English and the difficulty of the topic. Generally speaking, this workshop was successful in addressing the issues surrounding English as an international language, even though concepts like *international language* and *multilingualism* might have been difficult for some students to understand, as Japan is a highly monolingual country.

Reflections on Workshop 3

In this workshop, I originally planned to divide the students into several groups after viewing the video so that they could share and discuss their opinions, but time constraints prevented this activity. In case a teacher does not have a video of a company that uses English as an official language, he or she could simply provide a list of such companies and have students discuss the pros and cons of the companies' language policy.

Conclusion

I feel that students need to know that standard American and standard British English are just two of many varieties of the language and that many other varieties can be found in countries across the world, as well as within each country where English is widely spoken. If the standard varieties are the only teaching model, students may form a limited view of the English language, especially in the EFL context.

I am not against employing standard American English or standard British English as a teaching model. My point is that by becoming more informed about the sociolinguistic realities of English, students will become more proficient in the language, including the different varieties they will eventually encounter. Broadening their knowledge of English and all

its varieties and styles will also enable them to respect all dialects and deal with issues related to language planning and the use of English as an international language.

According to the students' comments, the workshops were helpful in raising their awareness of the varieties of English, language styles, and other issues. I believe the workshops are applicable, with some modification, not only to other EFL contexts similar to Japan but also to ESL contexts in the United States, Canada, or the United Kingdom because students in those countries always have chances to interact with international students and recent immigrants. I hope that more opportunities are provided to learners of English to help them better understand the nature of the English language and to help foster healthy attitudes toward language in general.

References

Aneki.com. 2004. *Most commonly spoken languages.* http://www.aneki.com/languages.html.

Crystal, D. 1997. *English as a global language.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Honna, N., and Y. Takeshita. 1998. On Japan's propensity for native speaker English: A change in sight. *Asian Englishes* 1 (1): 117–37.

Kachru, B. B. 1985. Standards, codification, and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the Outer Circle. In *English in the world: Teaching and learning the language and literatures,* ed. R. Quirk and H. G. Widdowson, 11–30. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Phillipson, R. 1992. *Linguistic imperialism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Preshous, A. 2001. Where you going, ah. *English Today* 17 (1): 46–53.

Trudgill, P. 2000. *Sociolinguistics: An introduction to language and society.* 4th ed. London: Penguin Books.

Trudgill, P. and J. Hannah. 1994. *International English.* 3rd ed. London: Edward Arnold.

TOSHIYUKI TAKAGAKI is an associate professor of English at Onomichi University, Hiroshima. He has conducted research on TESOL and bilingualism in Japan, the United States, and Canada.

APPENDIX | TOP TEN MOST COMMONLY SPOKEN LANGUAGES

Raising Students' Awareness of the Varieties of English • *Toshiyuki Takagaki*

Rank	Language	Number of Speakers
1.	Mandarin	1 billion
2.	English	508 million
3.	Hindustani	497 million
4.	Spanish	392 million
5.	Russian	277 million
6.	Arabic	246 million
7.	Bengali	211 million
8.	Portuguese	191 million
9.	Malay-Indonesian	159 million
10.	French	129 million